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JOURNAL MAKING

A Guide from the Creativity Lab



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About This Project

Journal making is a fun and versatile activity that presents different levels of complexity. It can be as simple as stapling together some sheets of paper, and as elaborate as creating an ornate book cover and intricate binding patterns.

Out of all the techniques used for creating books and journals, here we wanted to show a simple Japanese 4-hole stitch which we taught in Elementary school. It involves a bit of patience (threading needles, sewing, creating the holes), but is visually very appealing. However, please feel free to adapt the technique to your own specifications and needs.

This project guide provides helpful tips and processes on the introduction of creating a journal in the classroom. Educators can choose to extend this project through art and more complex techniques. The materials are cheap and can mostly be recycled: this activity is a great way to use up any scrap paper and cardboard that collects in the classroom!

Our Story

Journal making has taken place in different grade levels. This guide is a variation on Ms. Jess' original template. Students were invited to create journals to use throughout different classes, as a diary, space for reflection and documentation, or as a sketchbook. We let them fully personalise the journals to reflect their individuality and creativity, and encourage ongoing use of them.

During a Bay Area Maker Meetup, we participated in a variation of journal-making. We were introduced to the work of [Natalie Freed](#), who combined bookbinding and mathematics in her [stab-stitch](#) project and app. This could be an interesting project for older students to create intricate designs and explore graph theory.

Materials & Tools

MATERIALS

- Paper (various sizes)
- Thread/Embroidery Floss
- Cardboard
- Decorations & Bling
 - Duct Tape
 - Images for Collaging
 - Card Stock
 - Fabric
- Markers
- Glue

TOOLS

- Scissors
- Awls + foam
- Sewing Needles
- Rulers
- Hot Glue Gun
- Exacto Knives
- Binder Clips (optional)
- Cutting Mat

TIME: 60 min

Learning Targets

- I can look closely.
- I can explore complexity.
- I can envision unique possibilities and personalize my journal through different techniques and materials.
- I can create a journal from recycled materials, mixing creativity with refined skills.
- I can create works that convey ideas, feelings, and/or personal meaning.
- I can use my journal for documentation and reflection.
- I can document my work process and use this documentation to deepen/enrich my creative process.

Context: Before we make...

Journal making and bookbinding are extremely old techniques that involve simply assembling a book from a stack of paper sheets. The stack is bound together on one side with different techniques, which give flexibility to the pages. Methods include sewing, adhesive, or rings/coils. Covers are then added for decoration, identification, and protection. The project mixes specific skills (like sewing) and refined techniques (measuring and binding the paper) alongside the creative freedom of making and personalizing the cover.

For examples see these videos

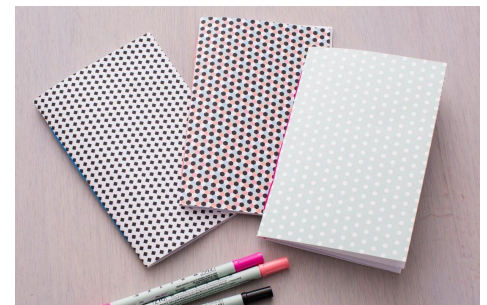
[Japanese Simple Stab Stitching](#)
[Handmade Book](#)
[DIY Journal](#)



[Japanese Bookbinding](#)



[Stab Stitching](#)



[DIY Notebook](#)

Material Management

Journals, sketchbooks and books can be easily made with recycled and scrap materials. Cardboard, paper sheets, and cardstock can be collected in class prior to the activity and distributed to the students. Have a wide array of paper types available to prompt the students to personalise their own book. Giving them options helps to nourish their creativity..

If students are picking up needle and thread for the first time, give them a brief group demonstration on how to use them. This might take a bit of patience, especially with younger children. To practice the motions, students could draw a design on foam plates, then use a needle and thread to follow it.

This is an individual project - encourage students to express themselves with their own journal, and inspire them to continue using it in other contexts (school, personal writing, etc...)

How to Introduce New Tools & Tech SAFELY

- Awls and cutting knives should be used with cutting mats. Remind students to use these when working at their tables.
- Be cautious when using hot glue guns: they can burn you quite easily!

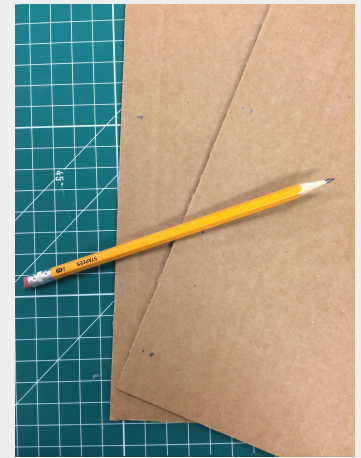
Step-By-Step Guide

This is a guide following a well-known technique: please note that you can bind the pages together however you want;. Feel free to adapt the guide to your experience, skill and grade-level. Journal making and bookbinding are open to interpretation. Encourage students to create their own binding techniques (fabric, duct-tape, scrap-paper etc...), and to explore with the decoration and design of the cover pages.

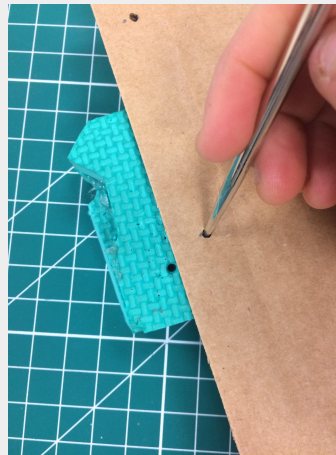
1. Prepare your paper
 - a. Stack the inside paper together
 - b. Choose the two covers
 - c. Place the inside paper in between the two covers
2. With a pencil, mark the holes on the pages. For this bookbinding guide, we have used a traditional 4-hole technique. Space the holes according to your preference. There should be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ " margin from the edge of the page.
3. Punch the holes in the covers using an awl or tack. Remember to use foam underneath.
4. Repeat step 3 with the inside pages. You can group them together (max. 10 sheets at a time) and hold them in place with the binder clips.
5. Align the pages and covers together.
6. Thread a big enough needle and follow the instructions on the next page for a japanese 4-hole stitch.



1.



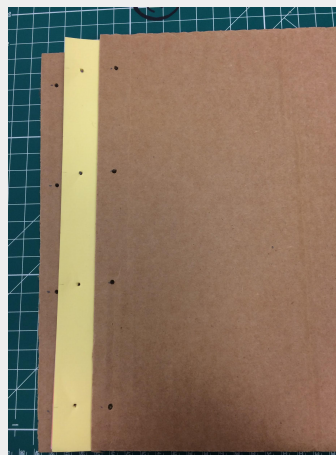
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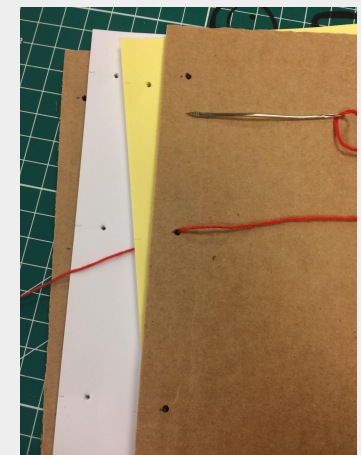
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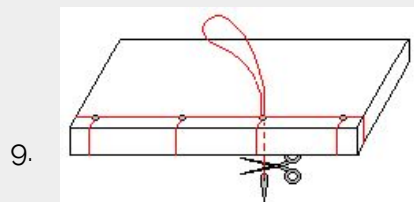
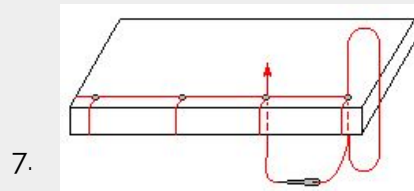
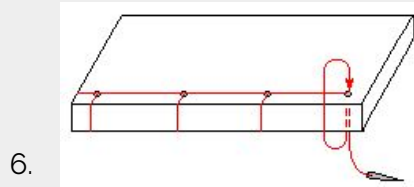
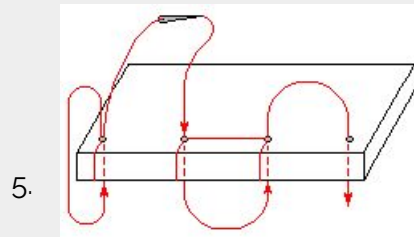
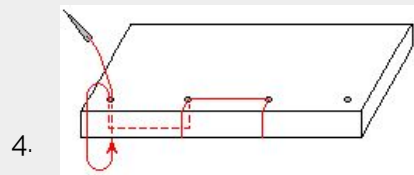
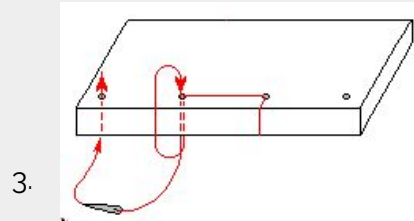
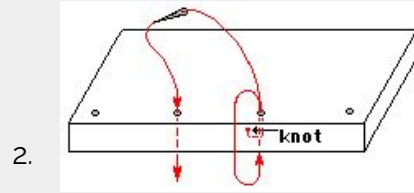
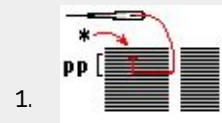


6.

4-Hole Binding

Guide taken from [WIKIBOOKS](#)

1. Thread the needle and tie a knot. Open the book a few pages and push the needle from the lower middle hole through the front cover. Pull the thread through until the knot is snug against the pages.
2. Go around the back and back up through the starting hole, then down through the other middle hole. Pull the thread tight after going through each hole.
3. Around the back again, then up through the top hole.
4. Around the back, then...
5. ...around the top of the spine and up through the top hole again. Keep going, down through one middle hole, back up through the next, and down through the bottom hole. Keep the thread tight.
6. Around the back again and...
7. ...around the bottom of the spine and back through the bottom hole. Go up through the starting hole again.
8. To finish, tie off the thread so the binding won't come loose. Do this by slipping the needle under two of the top threads coming out of starting hole and back through the loop to form a tight knot.
9. Run the needle back down through the starting hole and cut the leftover thread flush with the back of the book.



Project Extension: Paper Making

This extension to the journal guide shows how to create your own paper from recycled or scrap sheets. This is a great way to use up any left-over paper in the classroom and to personalize your journals.

Materials & Tools

MATERIALS

- Colored / white paper
- Assorted plant materials (leaves, fruit skins, seeds)
- Wooden picture frames
- Mesh Screens
- Water
- Staples

TOOLS

- Staple guns
- Scissors
- Towels & Sponges
- Small hammers
- Blender
- Scoops
- Spreading tool
- Clear bins
- Bowl
- Oven appropriate for paper drying (optional)

Notes

Divide workstations into the following:

- **Paper mold station** (mesh, frames, staple guns, hammers).
- **Pulp station** (white pulp bin).
- **Additives station** (colored pulp, plant materials, seeds).
- **Pressing station** (towels, sponges).
- **Drying station** (surface to transfer damp paper onto)

MAKING PULP

1. Tear up scrap paper and soak in water for a few hours or overnight before blending into a pulp in a blender.

2. Soak white scrap paper and solid colored scrap paper in separate bins. Plant materials can be added into white scrap paper while blending.

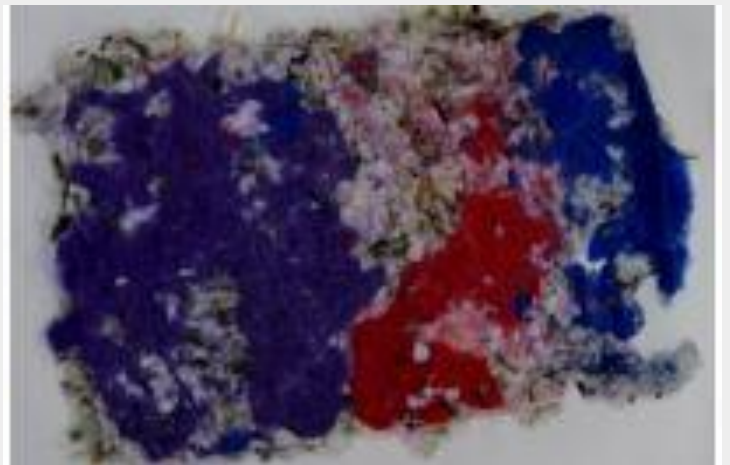


PRESSING & DRYING

1. Use towels and sponges to press water out of paper. It is helpful to have a water bowl nearby to squeeze/wring out absorbed water into.



2. Label a separate surface/paper with student names, remove damp paper from the mold and transfer on to the top of the surface to dry. Paper can be dried in the sun or on a filter paper in an oven (at low temperature, until the paper is fully dry)..



Project Extension: continued

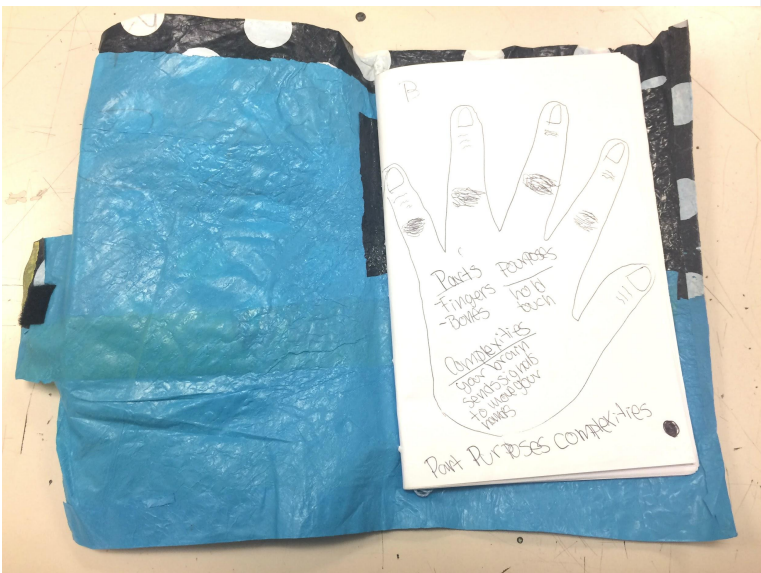
Journals as Portfolios: An intro to Documentation and Reflection

Introducing journals early on in the academic career of students gives them the opportunity to practice documentation and reflection in different classes - even ones not related to art or making - helping them create a portfolio of work.

Schools with teams of teaching artists, musicians, designers, and makers, are in a unique position to prototype and pilot a creative approach to meaningful, student-centered assessments. We believe that using portfolios and the documentation process that goes with it, will make a difference in our ability to create courses that engage students, teach reflection and evaluation skills, and take agency in their work in our elective and enrichment programs.

Portfolios should (be):

- An ongoing assessment that starts at the beginning of the course and continues throughout its entirety
- Learning Target aligned
- Include components that highlight a commitment to career readiness



Example of a student journal used to explore the complexities of a hand through [Parts, Purposes, Complexities](#).

Resources

Portfolio work, documentation and reflection are important practices in creative and non-creative classes alike. If you are an educator interested in starting a portfolio practice (digital and/or physical) in your class, [this document](#) provides useful help, resources and suggestions on how to start the process.

For digital portfolios, [Maker Ed](#) has compiled a useful and comprehensive [online guide](#).